

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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BLISS

6th August, 1947

THE CENTRAL ADVISORY COUNCIL for England set up under the Education Act of 1944 has issued its first Report.¹ The Council was appointed to advise the Minister upon such matters connected with educational theory and practice as it might think fit, and upon any questions referred to them by him. It decided to address itself, in the first instance, to the transition from school to independent life and the preparation for adult life which schools give or ought to give to their pupils. The Council took evidence from representatives of several Government departments and from more than thirty associations and national organizations concerned with education from many different points of view. The Report contains a fund of information about schools as they are (in contrast with the theory of what they should be), the relations between school, home and neighbourhood, employment and education, the young worker, health and the moral factor.

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THE "MORAL FACTOR" IN EDUCATION

It is on the concluding chapter on what is called with characteristic English understatement the "Moral Factor" that we want to concentrate attention. What the chapter is

¹ School and Life, H.M. Stationery Office 2s. 6d.

really concerned with is ultimate beliefs—that is to say with religion, and what it says and refrains from saying on this subject lays bare issues of the most far-reaching importance.

One cannot help recalling, by way of acute contrast, a debate on religious education in the House of Lords five years ago, on which we commented somewhat fully in the *Christian News-Letter* (C.N-L. No. 125). The debate was introduced by the Archbishop of Canterbury who made an impressive plea for Christian teaching in the schools. The support which the plea received was unanimous. Among the sixteen peers who took part in the debate there was not a dissentient voice. From reading that particular Hansard one might have gained the impression that England is indisputably a Christian country.

We said in our comments at the time that to assume, as was implied and explicitly claimed in the debate, that the views expressed by their lordships reflected the mind of the country as a whole, was a complete and dangerous illusion. We uttered a warning against taking false comfort from the debate, and drove the warning home by quoting a recent statement that “a turning away from reality has been the mark of the British mind since the beginning of the century”. The justification of that warning is abundantly supplied by the Report of the Central Advisory Council. For the first time, so far as we are aware, in an official publication the realities which underlie the problems of our national education are laid bare for all to see. Twenty men and women chosen as the nation’s advisers on education, many of whom might have said much more, in one direction or another, as individuals, are only able to achieve limited agreement over a narrow field. We ought to be grateful to the authors of the Report for the honesty with which they disclose their perplexities: small credit has been done to them thus far for this. But the seriousness of the situation is that the unresolved perplexities of the Report are only a reflection of a similar bewilderment in the teaching profession and in many sections of the nation at large.

It is noteworthy that the real issues should have been brought into the open in a consideration of the "moral factor" in education. To evade ultimate questions, which is what the English people always want to do so long as they can, is easier when, as in the controversies which preceded the recent Education Act, the question in debate is "religious" education. Religion, after all, is concerned, in part at least, with another world than the present. There is, at the same time, a widely prevailing feeling, however vague and ill-defined, that it ought somehow to have a place in life, and consequently in education, and if there is to be religion in the schools in this country it can hardly, in view of its history, be other than the Christian religion. The opposition of those who have ceased to believe in Christianity is mitigated by the comforting assurance that the inclusion of religious instruction in the curriculum will not in fact make any great difference one way or the other to the real work of the school. So we have the provisions in the 1944 Education Act for religious worship and Christian instruction, in spite of the fact that they do not reflect the real beliefs of a large number of teachers and a still larger proportion, probably, of parents.

But moral behaviour is something with which every one who cares for the welfare of society, whatever his religious beliefs, has a direct concern. It is a practical and pressing question which cannot be evaded. If morality breaks down, society falls to pieces.

PRESENT MORAL CONFUSION

The Council as it surveys the field covered by its Report, finds that the rapidity of social changes and the break-up of commonly accepted beliefs and standards have brought about widespread moral bewilderment and confusion. Growing numbers of people are inclined to doubt whether the traditional distinction between right and wrong is strictly a moral one, and not rather a matter of social or class convention; and more dangerous still, are tempted to question whether there is any absolute distinction between right and wrong at all.

Large numbers of men and women, we are told, "no longer feel that they share common beliefs, or are agreed on any set of permitted actions based on those beliefs. . . . From the time that Christianity first spread in Europe, men on the whole thought and acted on the basis of a broadly accepted idea of what life was about, they saw man's place and destiny as part of a divine plan and felt that man's conduct was subject to moral laws which were part of God's will". But "this framework of religious belief, together with the moral authority which it carried, have now largely disappeared". This picture of the state of things in England to-day, in the general truth of which the members of the Council who are Christians presumably concur, is very far removed from the rosy view which prevailed in the debate in the House of Lords. The old foundations having gone, men are looking for something new to take their place. Attempts are being made, the Report says, to find a new basis for moral standards in "the good of the community" or "the progressive development of scientific enlightenment".

The chief dissolvent of the classical and Christian traditions, which have underlain European culture, has been, in the view of the Council, the enormous growth of the experimental sciences, which have revolutionized men's ideas about the universe and about man himself, "by modern scientific ideas of space, by the theory of evolution, and by explorations into the nature of man's mind". As a result, "for a large number of men and women science has been enthroned as the authority and hope for man's future; for them science has displaced God, and the scientific tradition has eclipsed both the Christian and the classical lights".

The Council are in no doubt about the heavy strain which this state of mental confusion puts on the individual. They recognize also that this uncertainty about codes of thought and behaviour comes at a time when the increasing complexity of organized life makes greater demands on our moral resources, which can be met only by a fresh accession of moral energy; and at a time when the moral code has to be applied over a far wider area, since any conception at which British people may arrive of the meaning of world citizenship

must be strongly coloured by the code prevailing in the world as a whole.

IS THERE NO SOLUTION ?

The Council have no solution to offer of the problems they relentlessly expose. All that they can suggest is that children should be given the opportunity to see the value of the different traditions which have moulded the nation—Christian, classical and scientific—and should be helped to absorb, as part of their moral inheritance, the virtues of each. In the view of the Council there is still, happily, widespread acceptance of the traditional virtues, but great diversity of opinion about the grounds for recommending them to the young.

To suppose that agreement about the traditional virtues can for long survive the clash of ultimate beliefs is to live in a fool's paradise. In particular, in regard to the most fundamental of all questions that concern man's life, it makes a difference to everything that he thinks or does whether he has to live out his life in a world which has no meaning or value beyond what he himself gives to it, or whether there is in the universe outside himself a perfection to which he may aspire, a voice to which he may answer, a love to which he may respond, a grace by which he may be sustained. It is precisely about this question that, as the Report makes clear, there is the acutest division. The problem lies deeper than is suggested by the Council when they say that the real question which confronts our generation is what kind of person do we want the child to grow into. Much more fundamental than what we *want* is the question what man in his essential nature *is*.

What ought to be the response of Christians to this situation, vividly brought home to us in its bearing on the lives of the generations to come ? It is important to be clear in our minds that what we are considering here is neither the truth nor the propagation of Christian belief, but the quite different question of the proper action for Christians to take in regard to a national concern in a society in which active

Christians are only a small minority. There is an inveterate tendency to confuse these two related, but separate and distinct questions. It is the second to which we are seeking an answer here.

First, we must be grateful to the Council, as has already been said, for their courage in refusing to cover up the issues and in putting our predicament plainly before us. We cannot have a clear policy for the national education of our youth because we are divided in our ultimate beliefs. In our social life we hope that we are transcending the division into "two nations" and becoming one. But in the vitally important sphere of ultimate beliefs the division into two nations is proceeding apace. It can only do good that the danger should be clearly seen. The frank recognition of realities is in line with the recent change in policy in the B.B.C. by which controversial religious issues are openly debated. In the series of talks which have just been concluded on "What I Believe" the atheistic view of the world has been frankly and persuasively advocated. We ought to be glad that the Christian faith has to vindicate itself in free and open debate. It could be a far-reaching religious gain if the reality of God became a matter of genuine public concern.

Secondly, it would be quite a wrong course, even if it were practicable, for Christians to seek to impose by authority their own views on their fellow-citizens who do not share them. While far more than can be put into words is bound up with belief in God, to enlist the power of the State on behalf of a theistic basis for national education would in the prevailing mental climate only provoke strong reaction. We have witnessed an attempt to impose atheism by force, and we do not like it. It would be folly for Christians by their own actions to allow the religious issue to become a bone of acute political contention.

There is a better and more Christian way. We may hope that our national tradition of toleration may help us to tread it and, by doing so, to set an example to the world, which is in a similar predicament to our own. It is, in fact,

the way suggested in the Report. What seems at first sight to be a jejune and barren conclusion may contain richer opportunities than appear on the surface.

The Report asserts, as we have already noted, that there is at the moment a wide-spread acceptance of the traditional virtues. This acceptance, however precarious, is a present asset of great importance. If among those that differ, and know that they differ, in their ultimate beliefs, agreement can be achieved about the importance of transmitting to future generations the moral heritage of the past, while at the same time subjecting it to honest criticism, Christians will have opportunities of interpreting the values of the Christian strain in that tradition. With all true educators the manifest interest of the young will be a powerful factor on the side of such mutual toleration and co-operation. The authors of the Report are aware of the great dangers of children "being asked to shoulder what is at their age an unfair measure of responsibility in moral choice" between alternative views of life. It ought to be possible for a Christian teacher to expound his own view of the ultimate meaning of life in a way that will acquaint children, according to the measure of their capacity, with the difficulties which it has to meet; he will achieve his purpose better in so doing, since the children will inevitably encounter these difficulties when they go out into the world and need to be fortified to deal with them. It ought equally to be possible for a non-Christian to take account of the existence of the Christian view, and to give a sympathetic interpretation of it. It is the testimony of the late headmaster of Winchester, based on experience, that those who are not sure of their faith can be excellent teachers of religious knowledge. Even in the present deep and grave cleavage of opinion, a genuinely educational approach can do much to remove from the shoulders of the child an intolerable strain.

In such educational collaboration for the sake of the young, without compromise of conviction on either side, Christians may discover new talking-points with those who do not share their beliefs and fresh opportunities of bearing

witness to the faith by which they live. They will also gain a better understanding of the difficulties which those inured to the scientific way of thinking find in Christian belief, and by such understanding begin to bridge the seemingly impassable gulf which separates many men and women to-day from any kind of comprehension of Christian faith.

Thirdly, Christians must awaken, as they have not yet done, to the fact that the conception of God, which is the fundamental presupposition of all Christian teaching, has for multitudes to-day lost all meaning whatsoever. Where the idea of God has ceased to be intelligible, nothing is gained by the re-iteration of Christian affirmations. A task both theological and evangelistic of vast dimensions awaits us to give a fresh and living content to the conception of God in the light of modern knowledge. If, as Christians believe and know by experience, God is the inescapable environment of human life, every man, whether he knows it or not, is in daily encounter with Him. Can we discover those points in human experience at which, without being aware of it, men encounter and respond to God, and help our bewildered generation towards an understanding of the meaning of these experiences? That is the great and far-reaching challenge of the present situation. The fuller interpretation of it must be left for future News-Letters.

ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION

On April 11th last year a conference was held under the auspices of the Public Morality Council¹ on the subject of Artificial Insemination. The Report is now published.²

The report of this conference provides those who want it with a lucid survey of the facts, a minimum of point scoring and a ranging of the pros and cons along somewhat unexpected alignments. Among those who oppose it the most passionate disgust is from a doctor, and a brief and carefully reasoned speech from a leading anthropologist ends with the conclusion that the widespread use of artificial

¹ Chairman, the Bishop of London; Secretary, Mr. George Tomlinson, 37 Norfolk Street, Strand, W.C. 2.

² *Artificial (Human) Insemination*. Heinemann, 3s. 6d.

insemination by donors would very probably end in the collapse of a stable social structure. A major stumbling block in the way of clarification of moral questions, particularly those which concern sex, is the fact that Roman Catholics and other Christians come to such swift and sharp disagreement and the expectation of prejudice on the one side and lack of principle on the other prevents each from understanding what the other is saying.

The distinguishing feature of this conference, however, is that a group of men and women, disagreeing profoundly upon a subject of great delicacy, have yet contrived to speak to each other in a way which brings about genuine illumination of the subject. The reason for this is that all the speakers are agreed that they want to preserve and strengthen family life, and agreed that far more than merely physical factors are involved. In reviewing the report in the *New Statesman*, the editor, who considers it worth two and a half columns, does exactly the thing which makes clarification on a difficult issue utterly impossible. Mr. Kingsley Martin cannot conceive of any discussion at which scientists and theologians are present which will not develop into a pitched battle between them, with all the concern for human happiness on one side and all the damnatory clauses on the other. That is not a true picture of this conference, which in our opinion is a very good example of what such interchanges should be. Mr. Martin harps continually on the question of human happiness. Briefly summarizing the speeches of the opponents of artificial insemination by donors, he says, "The scientist with no criterion except human happiness may have listened to these arguments with a smile. . . . By the only two tests which matter in such affairs—the increase of love and happiness—A.I.D. passes with flying colours". What nonsense this is! Throughout the report the note of *reluctance* is continually struck—it is referred to by different speakers, on the part of husbands, wives and donors, and speaking for the unborn children, who can hold no opinion (to whom Mr. Martin never refers), the psychologist utters a warning on the possible effects on a child of secrecy and mystery surrounding his origin. There is an alarming

amount of sterility in modern society, and its effect is often unhappiness and frustration. But it is false logic (to say the least of it) to argue that the removal of unhappiness equals happiness. What if the removal of unhappiness should be a further and worse unhappiness, produced by a conflict between physical desire and a sense of moral dignity in the intimate personal relation between man and wife?

THE SUPPLEMENT

The Supplement to this issue is of a somewhat unusual kind. A reader of the News-Letter, whose work in China has given him the opportunity of understanding the point of view of many educated Chinese of the younger generation, received a letter from a young Chinese friend. At our instigation he consented to write some comments on it. The Chinese was, of course, writing a personal letter with no intention or thought of publication. It must not therefore be assumed from a reading of it that this is the view which all, or even a large number of Christians in China take of Communism. But it reveals a moral decision which presses acutely not only on young Chinese Christians, but also on young Indian Christians, eager to fulfil their faith in service to their people. The impatience of young Chinese and Indians, as they look round on their vast peasant populations living in abject poverty under systems of land ownership and tenure which bear so heavily on the poor, can be readily understood. But the zeal for radical reform has not blinded the eyes of the more astute of these young men to the possibility that in joining forces with the Communists they may be going for a ride on a very dangerous tiger.

Kathleen Bliss

P.S. The next News-Letter will be written by Mrs. J. L. Stocks, principal of Westfield College, London University, and a member of the Editorial Board of the News-Letter.

COMMENT ON A LETTER FROM A CHINESE CHRISTIAN

January 14, 1947.

"DEAR . . .

"I have recently come from my home, which was in the Communist region. I taught in their school for $2\frac{1}{2}$ years. I have seen many new things there. In these $2\frac{1}{2}$ years I think I have learned many things. . . .

"During my study in the puppet University I went to church every week and was interested in religion greatly. Just before my graduation I was caught by the Japanese Military Police, and was put into prison for one month. I met many cruel things, as to pour water on the face and into the mouth and nose, beating, throwing down on the ground, etc. . . . I prayed very earnestly and repeated the memorized Bible and hymns. It gave me a great change. I determined to devote myself to religious work, mainly to evangelism.

"I went home and hoped to teach in the primary school, waiting for circumstances to change. But the Communist political workers heard of me and invited me to go to their Middle School, which was called the Anti-Japanese Middle School. Since then I have taught for $2\frac{1}{2}$ years there.

"Some of the things we had discussed earlier helped me to break down my prejudices against the Communists, but at first I did not have any interest in their work. Gradually I found their higher workers are very kind, humble, and polite. Many new methods have been invented, the students have gradually self-control and democracy. There is a new spirit in the school. I am sure that China's new education will most probably go in their direction. As I compare these things with education in the cities, I find that there the Universities and Middle Schools are very old-fashioned, wasting the students' lifetime, energy and money. The change in the Communist region is a challenge to the whole of China.

“Recently I have gone around the local churches, and I do not feel optimistic. The Church cannot meet New China’s needs in city or countryside. People in the churches are not clear that the future of China lies in the people’s hands, not in the government’s hands. The whole doctrine of God’s Kingdom is meeting a great test.

“I do not mean that Christ is not needed in the present situation. On the contrary I have found that Christ-like people are very many among the country communists. They have a very eager zeal to serve the people—especially the poor and oppressed. They have invented many new methods to meet the social needs. They live very simply. They have very good self-examination and mutual examination. They have a great spirit of self-sacrifice. So I have thought much about the change needed in church work. The present need, I think, is for really Christ-like people. The Church needs to change its direction—to work from the standpoint of the poor and oppressed people, to study the countryside and its needs, to send out people to go to the country.”

This letter shows very clearly and sincerely the challenge which faces the thoughtful Chinese Christian when he meets the Chinese Communists. If he is honest with himself he has to recognize, (a) the practical and effective programme of reform which the Communists are achieving,¹ and (b) the nobility of character of the Communist leaders: “I found many Christ-like people among the country Communists.”

When we in England think of the Chinese Communists, the first essential is to suspend in our minds those ideas and judgments founded on western experience, and this for two reasons. First, China is still mainly a semi-feudal country, in which peasant revolt against landlord and official oppression has been smouldering ever since the T’ai P’ing Rebellion nearly a hundred years ago. The fires

Many adverse reports from the periphery of the Communist-controlled regions show that there are frequent exceptions to this statement. But from careful sifting of available evidence—which is nearly all biased one way or the other—and from the personal experience of those of us who have lived among the Communists—I believe the generalization to be a fair one.

have been suppressed, but the evils which feed them continue. Secondly, the Chinese Communists have achieved power. Over vast areas they have been not the opposition, but the government, and have a record of progressive and incorrupt administration. They alone of all local governments in China have attacked the agrarian problem at its roots.

Thus, in the eyes of the young idealist, the Communists form the vanguard of progress. "The change in the Communist region is a challenge to the whole of China."

This challenge is all the more telling, because the young people of Chiang K'ai-shek's China are bitterly conscious of frustration. Their freedom of thought and expression is strictly limited, secret police move among them, concentration camps are crowded with men and women suspected of "incorrect thought" (i.e. criticism of the Nationalist party). Nepotism, bribery, "squeeze," and disastrous inefficiency are common. Moreover, there is no chance to "get on with a job and forget about politics", as many social workers have found to their cost. Any vigorous piece of constructive work meets a myriad frustrations as it comes into conflict with vested interests and corrupt bureaucracy.

This is not to say that the Kuo Ming Tang (Nationalist party) is all bad or corrupt. There are many fine men within it, such as Chang Chün, the new Premier, a man of great integrity and ability, deeply influenced by Christianity. But they too are frustrated. Chang Chün himself is a member of the Political Science Clique within the Kuo Ming Tang, which is subordinate in power to both the Whampoa Clique, which controls the army, and the C.C. Clique,¹ which represents the interests of the landowning aristocracy.

Thus many a young man, despairing of the method of evolutionary change to heal China's miseries, looks sympathetically at the Communists, because he also is a revolutionary by force of environment. And many Christians have deliberately undertaken the dangerous crossing into

¹ The right wing of the Kuo Ming Tang, nicknamed from its leaders, the brothers Ch'en.

Communist territory, in the sincere belief that there they would find the best opportunity which China can offer for working out Christian faith in a life of service.

But here comes the dilemma. The Chinese Communists are not simply liberal reformers, they are thoroughgoing Communists, as Lord Lindsay argued convincingly in his speech of January 23rd in the House of Lords. Co-operation with bourgeois elements is their present strategy, with a United Front government, and no opposition tolerated. Freedom of thought and expression in Communist China exist subject to the severe limitation that there is practically no source of information other than party propaganda. So a recent letter from China reports a group of young Christians as saying: "If we have the Kuo Ming Tang, we have corruption; if we have the Communists, we shall eventually lose all liberty. We dislike both."

I have no intention here of discussing the extraordinary difficulty of the political impasse, nor the problems raised by American support to the Kuo Ming Tang and the potential Soviet support to the Communists. It is meant to illustrate the problem which faces the individual Christian in China, and the impossibility of his saying (as many Christians of the West delude themselves by thinking): "Let the Communists go their way. We will go ours. Our philosophies of life are in hopeless conflict." No Chinese can remain indifferent to the ever-present and disastrous civil war.

So the Chinese Christian must choose one of three courses.

(i) He may oppose the Communists. He will find himself aligned with the reactionary wing of the Nationalist party, which is all too ready to utilize him in preserving the *status quo*. "People in the churches are not clear that the future of China lies in the people's hands, not in the government's hands."

(ii) If he sees evil at both extremes, and endeavours to steer a non-party or third-party course of personal integrity, he puts himself into a minority at present almost powerless. It is true that sympathetic observers such as General Marshall and Dr. J. L. Stuart (present American Ambassador

to China) see the only hope for the future in the growth of this group in numbers, courage and energy. But at present the group is very weak in numbers and political influence. Most of the older people among the Christians who are politically alert take this course. Their political effectiveness is consequently far less than it would have been had they joined one of the two great parties. They have become spectators while the revolution goes on. They have lost the initiative.

(iii) He may choose deliberate co-operation with the Communists. This will make him an object of suspicion and hatred on the Nationalist side, and involves the real danger that he will be swallowed up and lost in a ruthless Communist party programme.

Christians have sincerely chosen each of these three courses, but to many thoughtful and idealistic young people, comparatively unburdened with family responsibility, the challenge of the third lies heavily on their conscience. They reason with themselves somewhat as follows :—

“ The common man in China has most to hope for from the integrity and reforming zeal of the Communists, and the future lies with them. The tide of history carries them on, whereas the Kuo Ming Tang stands, in the main, for an outworn social system. The Communists’ power is based on popular approval, whereas the Kuo Ming Tang power is based on the suppression of the people by an official class. This suppression is so ancient and entrenched that nothing short of revolution can remove it.

“ The Christian must identify himself with the people. In their service lies his lifework. So he must go where the chance of service is greatest. This means working alongside the Communists.

“ If his Christian faith cannot stand in competition with Communist belief and practice, then sooner or later its inadequacy must be uncovered and abandoned. But if his Christian faith is indeed that eternal truth which he believes it to be, he need not fear lest difficulty, discouragement or persecution harm it.

“ But he believes that in his Christianity there are values and strength which the Communists have not discovered. While he learns from them in the techniques of service, he may teach something of tolerance, humility, co-operation, concern for each individual person, and the life-changing vitality of the Spirit of Jesus. In mutual influence new truth can be discovered and experienced.”

Thinking in this way, a young Chinese friend said to me recently : “ There are twenty years ahead during which the weakness of the Chinese Communists will drive them to accept aid from everyone who will help their social programme. During those twenty years they themselves will inevitably modify their views and policies.” Thus there is real need and opportunity for Chinese Christians to overcome fear, and take a positive and co-operative attitude towards the Communists.

But what does that involve ? To become a Communist in China means to give up all the conveniences and comforts of life ; to become an outlaw in Nationalist China ; to learn to live as a peasant, in mud hovels, in rough and insect-ridden clothes, on coarse inadequate food ; to live without cinema, radio, music—almost without books ; to risk disease every day without doctors, hospitals, or adequate medicines ; to give up family, ambition and career.

Christianity cannot mean less than this. In fact it means more, for all these are implied in the surrender of the whole of life to the control of the Spirit of Jesus. In China, a Christianity which makes less than Jesus' full demand will fail as it fears dynamic and sacrificial Communism. But Christianity which derives its power from uncalculating loyalty to Christ can look at the Communist not with fear but with respect, and with confident decision to work with him over our vast common area of concern for the underprivileged and exploited working people.

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